

## **Mesquite Boulevard Corridor Plan Existing Conditions Summary Report**

### **Introduction**

The Mesquite Boulevard Corridor generally consists of properties along Mesquite Boulevard and the segment of Sandhill Boulevard south of Interstate 15. Included, within the corridor is the Central Business District (or Downtown), which is generally defined by Old Mill Road, the Town Wash, First South Street, and the properties along the eastern side of Sandhill Boulevard. The commercial corridor contains a variety of commercial, service, entertainment, and civic uses, including hotel/casino resorts, office buildings, commercial shopping centers, gas stations, restaurants, City Hall, parks, a satellite community college campus, a history museum, a post office, and art gallery.

Development patterns along the corridor create an auto-oriented environment that is generally characterized by wide streets, narrow sidewalks, large surface parking lots, buildings that are generally setback from the public sidewalk, and both conventional and xeriscape landscaping patterns. The development patterns discourage pedestrian activity and outdoor civic life, especially during hot summer months. While there are many assets and amenities along the corridor and the Downtown, there is no “Main Street” or public gathering area that residents can define as a true downtown or the heart of the community. Many properties along the corridor are undeveloped and underutilized, presenting an opportunity for new development that has the potential to transform the physical, social, and economic characteristics of the corridor and the Downtown.

Below is a summary of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and potential threats to the future success of the corridor and the Downtown. The items identified in this report represent viewpoints from community members as expressed in community meetings, focus group discussions, interviews, and intercept surveys conducted in November and December of 2008 by RBF Consulting and LL Consulting. This report is not an exhaustive list of all opinions that were expressed, but rather summarizes the common themes and ideas that were discussed and shared.

### **SWOT Analysis**

#### ***Strengths***

The Mesquite Boulevard Corridor and the Downtown have several strengths to build upon. The corridor is anchored by several hotel/casino resorts, which attract thousands of tourists to the community on an annual basis. Visitors primarily come to Mesquite for gaming, golf, spa treatments, entertainment, and affordable hotel rates. Mesquite also has a growing arts community, which brings people to the community for artist events and festivals.

The corridor has a variety of local and tourist-serving businesses that provide convenient places for residents and visitors to shop, work, and dine. Near the freeway exits, the businesses primarily cater to motorists driving through the community (gas stations, hotel/resorts, fast-food restaurants, etc). Along the remainder of the corridor, there are more local serving businesses, including grocery stores, local restaurants, retail stores, and service businesses. Civic uses are major assets along the corridor and within the Downtown. Civic uses include the City Hall, the Virgin Valley Heritage Museum, the Mesquite Fine Arts Center and Gallery, the Mesquite Library, the Mesquite Community

and Senior Center, the Mesquite Recreation Center, the Mesquite Post Office, several parks, and a satellite campus for the College of Southern Nevada. Two washes traverse the corridor, both of which are lined with multi-purpose recreation trails.

The Downtown contains a number of historic buildings and historic plaques that describe the unique history and heritage of the community. While most of the historic resources within the Downtown have been lost, Mesquite has a strong and unique history and heritage as a Mormon settlement and pioneer town.

Mesquite also has a strong artist community which attracts people to Mesquite for art events and festivals. Several arts organizations provide opportunities for people to enjoy visual and performance art within the community. The hotel/casino resorts provide venues for nationally recognized musicians and bands.

The setting of the corridor and Downtown provide attractive views of the surrounding hillsides and mesas. The climate and weather of Mesquite provides good opportunities to enjoy the outdoors during the fall, winter, and spring.

### ***Weaknesses***

Despite its strengths, the corridor and the Downtown have a number of weaknesses. While the corridor and the Downtown provide many convenient amenities to the community, they fail to offer a unique sense of place and a true gathering space for community. The corridor is primarily developed with auto-oriented “strip malls”. Within strip malls, the buildings are generally setback from the public sidewalk and street. Parking and landscaping are generally located in front of the building, which creates a streetscape scene that is dominated by asphalt and automobiles. This development pattern discourages walking between businesses and adjacent properties. It also creates a poorly defined streetscape, because the buildings have a poor relationship to the public street.

Downtown Mesquite fails to live up to the image and perception of a traditional downtown. Traditional downtowns generally have a pedestrian-friendly “Main Street” that is lined with storefronts, restaurants, and cafes. Downtown Mesquite does not currently have a “Main Street”. The Downtown consists of a variety of businesses and civic uses. A number of single family homes are also dispersed throughout the Downtown. This pattern of development does not provide opportunities for pedestrian activity and window shopping while walking down the street. In addition, the streets have very narrow sidewalks, which limits opportunities for street trees, pedestrian-scaled streetlights, streetscape furniture, and public art. The lack of shade trees and areas that provide relief from the hot summer sun are other factors that discourage public activity within the Downtown. As a result, there is no major reason for residents and tourist to spend an afternoon or evening enjoying the Downtown. In general, when people go to Downtown, they are driving to one or two specific businesses or destinations rather than walking throughout the Downtown to shop at numerous businesses within the area.

The corridor and the Downtown also have a number of properties with deteriorating landscapes and buildings. These properties create a negative image of the corridor and the community in general. In comparison to the new shopping centers to the north of I-15, the shopping centers along the corridor are generally viewed as dated and deteriorating.

Several business owners also stated that the process for opening a business in Mesquite is relatively expensive, time consuming, and confusing. Many community members expressed a need for additional assistance and information from the City or Chamber of Commerce on how to open a business in Mesquite, including information on the permit process and fees.

### ***Opportunities***

The City of Mesquite has the opportunity to greatly improve the Mesquite Boulevard Corridor and the Downtown. As an alternative to “strip mall” commercial development that is prevalent along the corridor, the vacant properties along the corridor could be developed with attractive commercial buildings that have a stronger relationship to the street and sidewalk. Parking lots could be placed to the rear or sides of the buildings to minimize expansive views of asphalt parking, which would greatly improve the visual character of the corridor. Xeriscape landscaping, shade trees, and streetscape amenities could be provided along sidewalks and buildings to create a more pedestrian-friendly and walkable environment. New gateway signs and wayfinding treatments could be created to enhance the sense of place and direct people from the hotel/casino resorts to the Downtown.

Within the Downtown, there are opportunities for infill development and redevelopment. Properties could be developed with mixed-use projects that provide space for retail stores, cafes, restaurants, service businesses, offices, and residential apartments and condominiums. Townhomes, apartments, condominiums and live-work units could also be constructed within the Downtown to increase weekend and nighttime activity. Live-work units could provide space for artist to produce and sell ceramics, paintings, and other arts and crafts. Establishing clusters of artist lofts could strengthen Mesquite’s reputation as an artist community, and create an economic niche that draws additional tourists to the area. Sidewalks along Palm Street, Yucca Street, Willow Street, and First North Street could be widened to provide space for street trees, pedestrian-scaled streetlights, outdoor dining, landscaping, streetscape furniture, and public art. Angled and parallel parking could also be provided along these streets to provide convenient access to new stores and businesses that line the streets. A new public plaza, connecting the City Hall to the Old Gym, could be created to establish a central gathering place within the community. This space could provide new opportunities for community events and festivals, serving as the heart of the community. Additional pedestrian improvements, including enhanced crosswalks, pedestrian paseos, and bridges could be constructed to improve access within the Downtown.

A shuttle system that provides frequent transport along the corridor from the hotel/casino resorts to the Downtown could also be created when the Downtown develops and matures into a true gathering space. This system would provide hotel guest easy access to the Downtown and other businesses along the corridor, while minimizing automobile traffic along Mesquite and Sandhill Boulevards.

### ***Threats***

A number of internal and external factors have the potential to threaten the future success of the corridor and Downtown. The current economic recession and mortgage foreclosure crisis will greatly limit funding and loans for new commercial, mixed-use, and residential development. Many realtors and bankers also expressed that Mesquite’s rapid growth over the past decade has created an oversupply of both retail and office space within the greater mesquite community. This reduces the

demand for new commercial development. New commercial space to the north of I-15 will also provide competition for the corridor and the Downtown.

Several property owners within the Corridor feel that their properties are undervalued and are worth more than their current appraised values. Some have stated that they are unwilling to sell or redevelop unless they can sell at rates higher than what the market generally allows for. Given the recent downturns in the housing market and overall economy, it is unlikely that many properties will be worth the perceived property values.

To implement the desired changes for the corridor and the Downtown, the City will need to play an active role in the process. The City will need to revise their zoning and development regulations and design guidelines to allow and promote the desired types of developments. Improvements to streets and public spaces will be required. The Redevelopment Agency may need to purchase and consolidate a variety of small parcels to create larger sites that are more attractive to developers. Given the current economic crisis, public-private partnerships and subsidies will be a key factor in the success of Mesquite. Since public funding for improvements is limited, it will be important for the City to invest in catalyst projects that help contribute to the sense of place and the creation of a true destination.